

May 21, 2026

## New Open

### 1. Historic Nara Prison to be reborn as luxury hotel HOSHINOYA Nara Prison Jun 25



A prison is perhaps the last thing visitors expect to encounter when traveling in Japan. But that could change when HOSHINOYA Nara Prison opens on June 25. In a bold move that redefines luxury, Hoshino Resorts has transformed the former Nara Prison, designated a “National Important Cultural Property,” into a luxury hotel with an adjacent museum. The iconic red brick building, completed in 1908, was one of five major prisons built by the Meiji (1868-1912) government to meet international standards. With 48 guest rooms, each created by combining multiple former cells, the hotel offers what it describes as “stays that feel like the dawn of a new era.” Defined by high ceilings and red brick walls, the rooms have been transformed into spaces that fuse historical enormity with contemporary design. Dining and activities reflect the Meiji spirit, from Japanese cuisine that highlights subtle, nourishing flavors and French cuisine that has uniquely evolved in Japan to perfume-blending experiences and rickshaw tours through historic Nara. The adjoining museum, which opened ahead of the hotel, features exhibits that thoughtfully introduce the architecture and historical background of Nara Prison. Alongside artworks that explore the concept of freedom, visitors can reflect on the broader themes of liberty and discipline.

[HOSHINOYA Nara Prison](#)

[Nara Prison Museum](#)

## New Open

### 2. Azuma Farm Koiwai to open as experiential luxury retreat in Iwate Apr 23

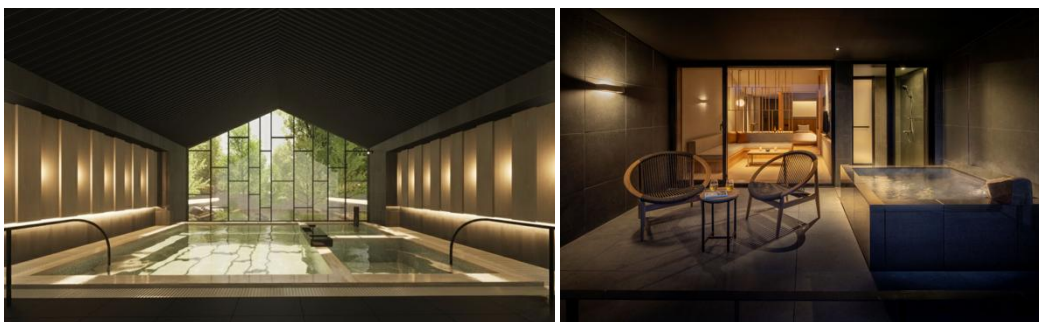


Azuma Farm Koiwai, with its focus on regional food and agriculture, is poised to reshape how discerning travelers experience Japan’s farm life when the luxury retreat opens in Iwate Prefecture on April 23. The inaugural property of the Azuma Farm brand embraces a philosophy centered on honoring Japan’s natural environment and culture while passing on this heritage to future generations. Set within the scenic grounds of Koiwai Farm in Shizukuishi Town, the retreat consists of 24 stand-alone villa-style accommodations and three private sauna pavilions, offering an intimate and exclusive immersion in farm life. Rooted in the farm’s more than 130-year legacy as a model of sustainable agriculture and conservation, the property showcases the region’s nature, farming, and culture through its “A Down to Earth Farm Stay” concept. Thoughtfully curated programs invite guests to engage directly with the farm’s abundant environment and heritage while enjoying freshly produced artisan specialties. Guests can also enjoy horseback riding experiences that connect them with the region’s long equestrian tradition as they ride through sweeping pastures at the foot of Mt. Iwate. Partnerships with communities across Tohoku further expand the experience to include diverse regional attractions, from rich natural landscapes and farm-to-table cuisine to local traditions. Located about a 25-minute drive from Morioka Station, the retreat is an easily accessible countryside escape. By blending historical heritage with contemporary design and enriching regional economies, Azuma Farm Koiwai aims to set a new benchmark for experiential travel in Japan.

[Azuma Farm](#)

**New Open**

**3. KAI Kusatsu to introduce tranquil onsen stay with private access to lively town in Gunma Jun 7**



©KAI Kusatsu

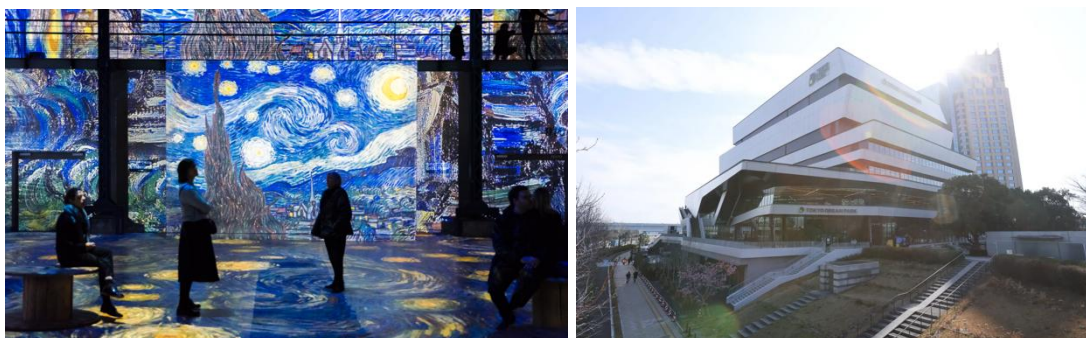
Kusatsu Onsen is one of Gunma Prefecture’s most popular hot spring resorts, famed for the geothermal steam rising from wooden chutes at its iconic Yubatake in the heart of town. KAI Kusatsu

will open here on June 7, introducing a 94-room ryokan that blends contemporary design with local heritage. Its rooms are designed to immerse guests in local culture. The Silk Art Room is an exquisite space featuring an impressive wall of handcrafted silk art. While the ryokan offers a serene retreat, a lively resort district filled with modern and traditional bathhouses awaits just beyond. Guests can have the best of both worlds, thanks to a private tunnel that connects the ryokan directly to the bustling town. Kusatsu is home to six major hot spring sources, two of which feed the ryokan's baths, including an open-air bath set among dramatic rock formations. Via the tunnel, guests can also visit public bathhouses such as the West Riverside open-air bath, an expansive outdoor bath overlooking Kusatsu's natural landscape. Beyond bathing, guests can explore Yubatake by day or night, attend the Yumomi and Dance Show at Netsu-no-yu, or venture farther afield to Onioshidashi Park or Karuizawa. Dining completes the experience: seasonal kaiseki at the ryokan highlights regional flavors, while the adjoining restaurant serves fragrant soba made from locally milled buckwheat.

[KAI Kusatsu](#)

## New Open

### 4. Paris-born immersive digital art experience to debut in Japan at Tokyo Dream Park Jun 12



©“ATELIER DES LUMIÈRES” in Paris

A Paris-born immersive digital art series will make its debut in Japan on June 12. The Lumières series, which has attracted more than 20 million visitors worldwide, will open its 10th global location. The venue is Tokyo Dream Park in Ariake, a newly developed entertainment complex featuring a multipurpose hall and a theater for musicals, concerts, and live performances. The series will be staged in a space named “RÊVE DES LUMIÈRES” (Dreams of Light), and it is scheduled to open in early summer. More than 100 high-definition projectors and advanced sound systems will create large-scale digital projections designed to stimulate all five senses. Based on the concept of “Awaken with a Shower of Art,” the space fuses light and sound to present an immersive, multisensory environment. Visitors will be enveloped by music and imagery reaching up to eight meters, creating the sensation of stepping inside the artworks. “Van Gogh” is the commemorative first installment of the series, bringing Vincent van Gogh's iconic works to life through motion, light, and sound, and offering a fresh way to appreciate his vivid colors and expressive brushstrokes.

[RÊVE DES LUMIÈRES Tokyo](#)

[TOKYO DREAM PARK](#)

## Special Experience

## 5. Create your own jeans in the birthplace of Japanese denim, Okayama



©Okayama Prefectural Tourism Federation

Kojima, a district of Kurashiki City in Okayama Prefecture, prospered as a textile town during the Meiji era (1868-1912). Today, this laid-back coastal area draws discerning shoppers from around the world in search of Japan’s most coveted premium denim. Japanese denim is prized for its durability, unique texture, and meticulous craftsmanship. Using traditional shuttle-loom weaving techniques, manufacturers produce the distinctive selvedge fabric favored by enthusiasts; industry estimates suggest Japan accounts for more than 60 percent of global selvedge denim production. In Kojima, denim is woven into the fabric of daily life — from vending machines to bus seats, denim-inspired designs appear throughout the town. There is even an entire street devoted to the craft, lined with flagship stores of Japan’s leading labels. At the Betty Smith Jeans Museum & Village, visitors can explore this history while creating a pair of original jeans. Founded in 1970, Betty Smith is one of Kojima’s pioneering denim brands. The one-hour hands-on experience takes place at an “experience factory” on the grounds, where participants begin by selecting a base size. They then choose buttons and rivets — the defining details of any pair — from 24 options and hammer them into place. To finish, a leather patch is selected from around 50 designs and attached by professionals, allowing participants to take their finished jeans home the same day.

[Experience making your own original jeans in Kurashiki/ Kojima](#)

### Special Experience

## 6. A Heritage Flame: Discover Okazaki’s traditional candles in Aichi



©Aichi Now; Official Travel Guide of Aichi, Japan

©Matsui Warousoku Studio

Okazaki in Aichi Prefecture is one of the few places in Japan where traditional candlemaking still survives. Among its leading practitioners is Master Matsui, whose family has been crafting “wa-rosoku” (traditional Japanese candles) for more than 110 years. Visitors can have a rare opportunity to observe this traditional craft up close. Distinctive in shape and the quality of their flame, wa-rosoku produces a softer, steadier light with minimal smoke or odor. At Master Matsui’s workshop, visitors can watch the crafting process in which tightly wound wicks, made from traditional paper wrapped around bamboo skewers, are repeatedly dipped into molten wax derived from lacquer tree seeds. Larger candles may require up to 300 layers, each applied by hand. The workshop also offers visitors the chance to paint their candles. Known as “e-rosoku,” these picture-painted candles have been used in Japan for centuries. Those interested can make a reservation to join a hands-on session or purchase original works on site. Hands-on experiences are available on weekdays and take approximately one hour.

[See the traditional lights of Okazaki](#)

### Special Experience

#### 7. Knead like a local in Kagawa and master the art of Sanuki udon



©UDON HOUSE

With a history said to span more than 1,000 years, udon (thick Japanese noodles made from wheat flour) has long been a part of everyday life in Japan, especially in Kagawa Prefecture, where it is known as Sanuki udon. At Udon House, an immersive one-night, two-day program invites visitors to learn the craft of making this local specialty from scratch. Housed in a nearly 100-year-old traditional Japanese home that was renovated into a workshop and guesthouse, Udon House offers a deeply hands-on experience. Guided by local udon specialists, participants explore the fundamentals of Sanuki udon, from kneading and rolling dough to cutting and boiling the noodles. The first day includes lessons on dashi and umami, as well as tastings that highlight different udon styles. In the afternoon, participants visit a farm to learn about local agriculture and seek fresh udon toppings before returning for practical instruction in dough rolling and cutting techniques. The day concludes with a hands-on udon dinner, where participants learn to boil the noodles and experiment with toppings and variations. On the second day, guests enjoy an udon breakfast tour at beloved local noodle shops. Optional activities are available afterward (additional fees apply), including exploring nearby islands in the Seto Inland Sea or experiencing the coastline through seasonal outdoor activities.

[Udon House](#)

### Special Experience

## 8. Explore the world of whisky with all five senses at Saburomaru Distillery in Toyama



Located in Tonami City — an area blessed with pure water, lush greenery, and strong local traditions — Saburomaru Distillery blends innovation and heritage to express Toyama Prefecture’s character through whisky. This unique identity is embodied in the distillery’s equipment — from a cast-copper still crafted using Takaoka’s renowned metalworking techniques to wooden casks produced with the traditional woodworking skills of Inami — as well as in the pristine local water that underpins its whisky. Since beginning production in 1952, the distillery has worked to share Toyama’s distinctive whisky both in Japan and abroad, including welcoming visitors on guided tours. During the distillery tour, guests explore the whisky-making process, from fermentation to maturation, through all five senses. Highlights include the world’s first cast-copper pot still, as well as visits to the barrel storage area and the on-site workshop. The one-hour tour includes a tasting of Saburomaru whisky, along with two mini bottles and an original glass to take home. For a deeper experience, the Handfill and Distillery Tour allows participants to bottle their own 700 ml whisky directly from the cask.

[Saburomaru Factory Tour](#)

### Special Experience

## 9. Slow travel in Hokkaido provides an intimate look at authentic Japanese food culture

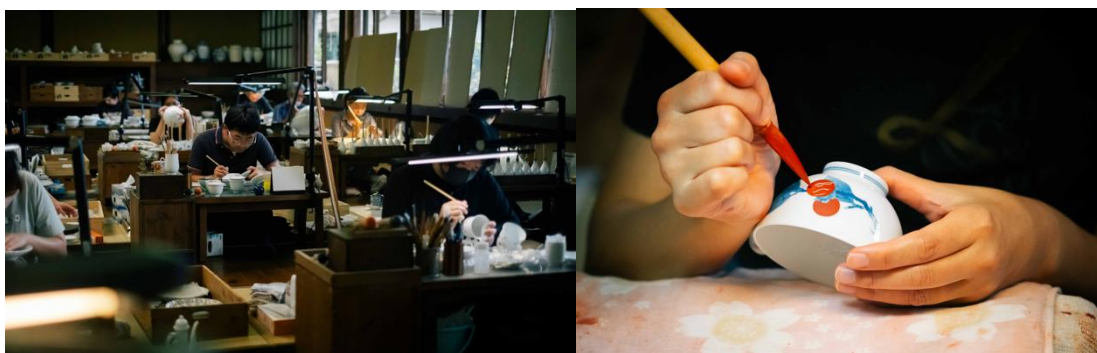


In southeastern Hokkaido, the Tokachi region stands as one of Japan's most important food bases, producing more than 10 times the amount of food consumed by its population. Shaped by a cool climate, fertile plains, and vast open landscapes, Tokachi provides an ideal setting for authentic experiences offered by Slow Travel HOKKAIDO. Centered around Tokachi's 19 municipalities, with Obihiro City as its hub, visitors are invited to explore Japanese food culture through customized or fixed tours that cover diverse farming and production, including sustainable practices. Participants learn directly from farmers, fishermen, and other producers about local agriculture, fishing, and winemaking, while enjoying wholesome meals rooted in everyday local cuisine. For those interested, itineraries can even be customized to include deer-hunting experiences. Other activities range from glamping amid Tokachi's expansive natural scenery to hands-on programs, such as papermaking using discarded vegetables and making simple bean rice balls. Tour options range from short half-day experiences to immersive multi-day itineraries. For example, the three-day, two-night Premium Tour weaves together farm visits, a kombu kelp fishing experience, and a fisherman-prepared seafood lunch. Guests cycle through open farmland, enjoy a Tokachi food barbecue dinner, and may even soar above the plains in a hot air balloon. The journey culminates in cooking butajiru (miso soup with pork and root vegetables) using ingredients gathered along the way.

[BEHIND THE GOOD TASTE: A tour to enjoy food in Tokachi, Hokkaido](#)

## Luxury Travel

### 10. Kakiemon family offers rare insight into centuries-old porcelain art through exclusive tour in Saga



Located in western Saga Prefecture, Arita is widely regarded as the birthplace of Japanese porcelain. Since the first porcelain was fired here in the early 17th century, Arita ware has shaped ceramic culture far beyond Japan's shores. Among its most notable achievements is "nigoshide," a milky-white porcelain now designated an "Important Intangible Cultural Property." Using nigoshide as a base, the so-called Kakiemon style emerged in the late 17th century, in which "akae," the technique of overglaze painting, is applied to create compositions with ample negative space. The style, developed by the first-generation Sakaida Kakiemon, quickly gained high acclaim in Europe. An exclusive, approximately two-hour tour offers rare insight into the world of the Kakiemon Kiln and the art of nigoshide. The experience begins at the gallery with an introduction to the Kakiemon style and its history. Guests then visit the Kakiemon Old Ceramics Reference Gallery, where they trace the evolution of Arita ware and the distinctive styles of successive Kakiemon generations. The tour continues into the kiln and studio — areas normally closed to the public — where participants learn about wheel-throwing techniques and observe the painting process. Tea and sweets are then served in a private building overlooking a garden, before the experience concludes with time to admire and optionally purchase works in the gallery.

[The Treasures of Arita: Exclusive Tour of Kakiemon Kiln and the Art of Nigoshide](#)

Notes:

- The above details are correct as of the time of publication, and are subject to change.

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